

**DECISION NOTICE  
&  
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT**

**PALS Project #27995  
Ditch Bay Analysis Area  
Compartments 321, 322, and Related Areas**

USDA Forest Service  
Wakulla Ranger District, Apalachicola National Forest  
Wakulla County, Florida  
T3S, R2W; T3S, 3W

**BACKGROUND**

Ditch Bay Analysis Area spans two compartments, totaling approximately 8,400 acres. It is located in the southeast section of the Wakulla Ranger District (WRD) of the Apalachicola National Forest (ANF). The analysis area falls within the Management Areas 7.1 (Longleaf/Slash Pine, Adaptive Management, RCW Management). This analysis area was chosen because of its location, its condition and the need to improve RCW habitat.

The purpose and need for the proposed action is to improve current and future Red-cockaded Woodpecker (RCW) habitat, improve forest health and sustainability and to move the analysis area from its existing condition toward its desired future condition. This action will help implement the direction of the 1999 Revised Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP) for the National Forests in Florida for approximately 698 acres. The forestwide management goals and objectives for the Revised Plan (hereafter referred to as the Forest Plan) are outlined on pages 2-3 through 2-7 of the Plan.

**DECISION AND REASONS FOR DECISION**

Based upon my review of the environmental assessment (EA), I have decided to implement Alternative B to improve RCW habitat. Red-cockaded woodpeckers' habitat will be improved by increasing nesting cavities, removing oak midstory, thinning pine plantations, reducing hazardous fuels, restoring longleaf and slash pines species, and restoring native groundcover. This alternative will also maintain and improve forest health and sustainability in the Ditch Bay Analysis Area. When compared to the other alternatives, Alternative B best meets the purpose and need for Management Area 7.1. The chosen alternative will be reflected in the Silvicultural Prescription, a document used for implementation on the ground.

The proposed action will treat approximately 698 acres. Actions connected to the proposed action will include maintainance of approximately 6.1 miles and reconstruction of approximately 6.6 miles of Forest Service roads. Adhere to the District Archeologist's

recommendation for cultural resource protection. Reference the Silvicultural Prescription and the following tables for specific details on the selected alternative.

**Table 1: Alternative B – Proposed Action**

Treatment	Comp	Stand	Acre	Forest Type	Cond Class	Age	Basal Area
<b>Midstory Removal (Hexazinone)</b>	322	34	6	21	10	76	60
	Total		6				
<b>Thin Every Other Row, 50 - 60 BA</b>	321	3	6	22	11	26	134
	321	29	16	22	11	23	103
	321	36	82	22	11	26	108
	332	27	37	22	11	25	110
	Total		141				
<b>Third Row-thin, 50 - 70 BA</b>	321	27	4	22	11	26	69
	321	28	49	22	11	26	108
	321	32	51	22	11	26	96
	321	33	68	22	11	26	97
	321	68	23	22	11	34	71
	321	81	28	22	11	26	110
	322	72	56	22	11	34	92
	333	36	19	22	11	26	107
	333	55	24	22	11	21	82
	Total		322				
<b>Clearcut, Hexazinone Site Prep, Site Prep Burn, Plant Longleaf,</b>	321	62	5	22	9	42	90
	333	27	29	22	9	44	58
	Total		34				
<b>Mechanical Site Prep, Site Prep Burn, Plant Longleaf Herbicide Release (Triclopyr),</b>	321	25	22	21	15	16	0
	321	52	23	21	15	16	0
	321	55	5	21	5	64	17
	321	60	6	22	6	62	6
	321	66	4	22	11	34	32
	321	69	19	22	11	34	43
	321	84	5	21	15	34	0
	321	85	4	21	5	34	10
	321	86	4	21	15	23	0
	322	74	5	21	6	35	10
	322	75	10	22	5	35	10
	Total		107				

Treatment	Comp	Stand	Acre	Forest Type	Cond Class	Age	Basal Area
<b>Mechanical Site Prep, Site Prep Burn, Plant Slash Pine</b>	321	67	14	22	11	34	28
	Total		14				

<b>Mechanical Fuel Reduction</b>	322	1	11	22	11	34	50
	322	2	51	22	11	34	40
	322	3	12	22	11	34	50
	Total		74				

<b>Plant Wiregrass</b>	321	25	22	21	15	16	0
	321	52	23	21	15	16	0
	321	55	5	21	5	64	17
	321	60	6	22	6	62	6
	321	62	5	22	9	42	90
	321	84	5	21	15	34	0
	321	85	4	21	5	34	10
	321	86	4	21	15	23	0
	322	34	4	21	10	76	60
	333	27	29	22	9	44	58
Total			107				

Treatment	Comp	Stand	Insert	Forest Type	Cond Class	Age	Basal Area
<b>Red-cockaded Woodpecker Artificial Cavities</b>	322	22	4	21	10	80	60
	322	25	4	21	10	77	60
	322	26	4	21	10	77	60
	322	34	4	21	10	76	60
	Total		16				

Quantities are estimates based on preliminary measurements and actual quantities will be determined during sale layout.

Grand Total in MBF (conversion factor CCF x 0.55) = 1,662 MBF

**Table 2: Connected Actions Summary**

Type of Action	Location, Forest Road Number or Category	Miles
<b>Road Reconstruction</b>	Compartment 321: 300-PP, 365-A, 348-C, 348-N, 300-AA Compartment 322: 348-F Compartment 332: 348-C Compartment 333: 365-A	6.6
<b>Recurring Road Maintenance</b>	Compartment 321: FH-13, FR-348, FR-365 Compartment 322: FR-348 Compartment 332: FR-348 Compartment 333: FH-13, FR-365, 365-A	6.1

## COORDINATION MEASURES

Coordination measures were developed to ease some of the potential impacts to the physical, biological, and social-economic environments. The mitigation measures may be applied to that of the action alternatives.

### **Proposed, Endangered, Threatened and Sensitive (PETS) Species**

- *If modifications are made in the project that may result in an impact on threatened or endangered species, or if additional information regarding the effects of the project on listed species becomes available, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (US FWS) will be notified and informal consultation will be reinitiated if the US FWS or the Forest Service determines it is needed (EA Appendix B, BE-12).*
- *Timber and road contracts will prohibit harvest, hauling, and/or roadwork within active Red-cockaded Woodpecker (RCW) clusters during the nesting season, April 1 through July 31. Exceptions will be made for hauling and/or roadwork on major numbered roads and highways (FS Level 5, 4, 3 Roads). Exceptions will also be made during nesting season if a biologist determines through direct observation that the cluster is no longer active, there is not a pair, or the young have fledged before July 31 (EA Appendix B, BE-8).*
- *All efforts will be made to retain the larger size classes when trees are identified for removal. Stand that do not have at least 18 trees/acre  $\geq 14$ " diameter at breast height (DBH) would have diameter cut limits that would vary by stand depending on the existing size class structure. These diameter cutting limits would be included on the stand treatment cards, or cut cards. If trees in the larger diameter classes ( $\geq 14$ " DBH) are limited, less than 18 trees per acre, only smaller trees should be removed, except in rare occasions for operational purposes. The 14" size class includes trees from 13.6" to 14.5" DBH (EA Appendix B, BE-8, BE-12).*
- *WL-11 - If gopher tortoise burrows are found clearly mark a 15-foot buffer around the entrance to every burrow. Keep heavy equipment out of this buffer zone during both harvesting and regeneration (LRMP, 3-29; EA Appendix B, BE-8) in Compartment 321: stand 62; Compartment 333: stand 27.*
- *Purchasers and contractors will be advised of the possible presences of threatened, endangered, and sensitive species and will be instructed to avoid harming any wildlife they encounter, including snakes (EA Appendix B, BE-8).*

### **Heritage Resources**

- *HE-1 If any cultural resources are discovered during operations all ground-disturbing activity will cease. The Forest Archeologist will determine changes to be made to the project before work resumes (LRMP 3-5).*

- ***HE-9** Known cultural resource sites will be protected by timber sale contract and no ground-disturbing activities will occur in these areas, which may include segments of roads (LRMP, 3-6).*

### **Soil & Water**

- ***WA-1** Adhere to standards of Florida's Silvicultural Best Management Practices (BMPs). For a detailed discussion of these practices, see the Silviculture BMP Manual, 2004 Revision.*
- ***WA-2** A 35-foot Special/Streamside Management Zone (SMZ) will be required in the following areas (LRMP, 3-24): Compartment 321 – stands 32, 36, & 62; Compartment 322 – stands 34, 72 & 74; and Compartment 332 – stands 27.*
- *No operation of heavy equipment will occur during periods when weather and soil conditions will promote excessive rutting or compaction (EA Appendix B, BE-8).*

### **Vegetation**

- ***VG-37** - Control invasive terrestrial and aquatic weeds. Do not apply herbicides within 60 feet of any PETS plant species unless analysis indicate herbicide use is the best way to protect PETS plants from invasive weeds. (LRMP, 3-23). Contract specifications for equipment cleaning will be placed in contracts to prevent the introduction of exotic plants.*
- ***VG-18** – Minimize soil-disturbing site preparation in longleaf and slash pine sites. When disturbance is necessary to achieve the desired future conditions, use methods that displace no more than 10 percent of the soil surface in the treated area. The objective should be to maintain the integrity of the native herbaceous vegetation (especially wiregrass) overtime (LRMP, 3-20).*
- *Follow guidelines for planning and applying herbicides (Veg. Mgmt. FEIS, 1989).*

### **Visual Quality**

- ***VG-15** - To enhance visual quality, require that slash, tops, and logging debris be piled on more than 2 feet high within 100 feet of Forest Roads (FR) 348 and Forest Highway (FH)-13 (LRMP, 3-19).*

## OTHER ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

### *Alternative A – (No Action)*

Under this alternative, only normal operations such as prescribed burning for fuel reduction, road maintenance on roads that are currently graded, and landline maintenance will continue. No commercial harvesting of timber or road reconstruction will occur as a result of this analysis.

### *Alternative C – (Handtools)*

Under this alternative, the proposed treatments would be same as the proposed action with the exception of the use of handtools for site preparation prior to planting and used to release longleaf seedlings.

## PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The Apalachicola National Forest used the “scoping” process to notify individuals and groups within and outside the organization to obtain comments regarding the proposed and connected actions.

Initially, Ditch Bay proposal was announced to the public in the second quarter of Fiscal Year 2009 Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA) for the National Forests in Florida. Public involvement efforts consisted of a legal notice published in the paper of record and a correspondence mailed to interested individuals, tribes, organizations, and other agencies on the ANF mailing list. The SOPA provided a general location and description of the proposed action in the Ditch Bay Analysis Area. The correspondence provided a more detailed description and a treatment map (enclosed in letters only) of the proposed action for solicitation of comments. A legal notice announcing a 30-day Notice and Comment period on the proposed action pursuant to 36 CFR 215.5 was published in the *Tallahassee Democrat* on June 25, 2009. The draft EA was posted on the National Forests’ in Florida webpage for public review. As a result of public involvement, five responses were received from the requests for comments.

Internal scoping was accomplished through the interdisciplinary process. Several Interdisciplinary Team (IDT) meetings were held in the spring of 2009 to develop the initial list of issues. Issue statements were developed by the IDT to drive the development of alternatives and to facilitate assessment of those alternatives for implementing the proposed action. Concerns or issues provided by the public and the ID Team are:

1. Potential impact of herbicide use
2. RCW nesting season disturbance (April 1 – July 31) conflicting with dry period for timber harvesting
3. Protection of slash pine seedlings from fire damage during prescribe burns

## FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

After considering the environmental effects described in the Environmental Assessment, I have determined that these actions will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment considering the context and intensity of impacts (40 CFR 1508.27). Thus, an Environmental Impact Statement will not be prepared. I base my finding on the following:

1. The finding of no significant environmental effects is not biased by the beneficial effects of the proposed actions (EA, pages 23-25).
2. There will be no significant effects on public health and safety. The activities prescribed are commonplace forestry activities, which have been utilized many times in the past (EA, page 60).
3. There will be no significant effects on unique characteristics of the area. Visual resource mitigation measures have been put in place to reduce the visual affect of the management actions (EA, pages 57-58).
4. The effects on the quality of the human environment are not likely to be highly controversial. There is no known scientific controversy over the impacts of the project (EA, page 60).
5. The Forest Service have considerable experience with the types of activities to be implemented. The effects analysis shows the effects are not uncertain, and do not involve unique or unknown risk (EA, pages 23-25)
6. The action is not likely to establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects, because these actions are limited in scope and intensity and are also limited to the analysis area (EA, pages 33-35,48-51, 59-62).
7. The cumulative impacts are not significant (EA, pages 33-35,48-51, 59-62).
8. The action will have no significant adverse effect on districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, because the locations for these activities have been surveyed for these unique resources. The action will also not cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources, because any items of interest found during the surveys have been avoided or mitigation measures have been put in place to avoid impacts to these resources (EA, pages 25, 51-52).
9. The action will not adversely affect any endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act of 1973. A biological evaluation was completed for plants and animals and the US Fish and Wildlife Service has reviewed those biological evaluations and concurs with the findings (EA, Appendix B).

10. The action will not violate Federal, State, and local laws or requirements for the protection of the environment. Applicable laws and regulations were considered in the EA. The action is consistent with the Land and Resource Management Plan for the National Forests in Florida (EA, page 10).

## **FINDINGS REQUIRED BY OTHER LAWS AND REGULATIONS**

This decision to implement Alternative B is consistent with the intent of the Forest Plan's forestwide goals and objectives listed on pages 2-3 to 2-7. The project was designed in conformance with land and resource management plans standards and incorporates appropriate land and resource management plan guidelines for vegetation management, ground cover restoration, and wildlife habitat improvement. Clearcutting is the optimal cutting method to be used for restoration of stands (62 of compartment 321 and 27 of compartment 333) back to longleaf pine. Longleaf is the species of pine, which naturally grew on this site as recognized by the forest plan and the soils. None of the other cutting methods such as shelterwood with reserves would be appropriate because there are no longleaf pine trees on this site to act as seed sources for natural regeneration.

## **ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW OR APPEAL OPPORTUNITIES**

This decision is subject to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215.11. Individuals or organizations that submitted substantive comments during the comment period may appeal. Appeals must meet content requirements of 36 CFR 215.14. Written appeals, including attachments, shall be sent to: National Forests' in Florida, ATTN: Appeals Deciding Officer, 325 John Knox Road, Suite F-100, Tallahassee, Florida 32303-4160. Appeals may be faxed to (850) 523-8504. Hand-delivered appeals must be received within normal business hours of 7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday to Thursday and 7:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. on Friday, closed on federal holidays. Appeals may be mailed electronically in a common digital format to [appeals-southern-florida@fs.fed.us](mailto:appeals-southern-florida@fs.fed.us). This legal notice is the exclusive means for calculating the time to file an appeal within 45 days of the publication date in the *Tallahassee Democrat*. Those wishing to appeal should not rely upon dates or timeframe information provided by any other source.

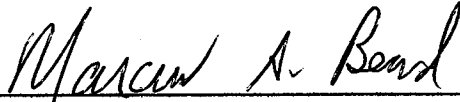
## **IMPLEMENTATION DATE**

If no appeal is received, implementation of this decision may occur on, but not before, five business days from the close of the appeal filing period. If an appeal is received, implementation may not occur for 15 business days following the date of appeal disposition. In the event of multiple appeals of the same decision, the implementation date is controlled by the date of the last appeal disposition.

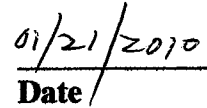


**CONTACT**

For additional information concerning this decision or the Forest Service appeal process, contact Gary Hegg, Silviculturist, Wakulla Ranger District, 57 Taff Drive Crawfordville, Florida 32327; or call at (850) 926-3561.

**MARCUS A. BEARD**

District Ranger

  
**Date**

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